

Original Paper

Principles of Validity in Interpretation: On Hirsch's Method of in Defense of the Author's Intent

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Abstract

Hirsch inherits the objective viewpoint of Schleiermacher and Dilthey's partial texts, criticises psychologism, historicism, and the proponents of semantic autonomy by distinguishing between meaning and significance, defends the determinacy of meaning, and demands a return to the author's original intention. The existence of word meaning determines the composition of text meaning. Hirsch requires the determination of the intrinsic genres in context and convention, to guess based on the inherent genres, verify interpretations with higher probability, and approach the intended meaning of the speaking subject. Hirsch proposed that verifying the validity in Interpretation is to imaginatively reconstruct the speaking subject through the evidence provided in a certain text to determine to what extent the explanation conforms to the author's intention.

Keywords

meaning, interpretation, genres, principles of probability

1. Introduction

At the beginning of hermeneutics, interpreting meant to turn the ununderstandable into understandable, which is the traditional hermeneutic theory of text interpretation. In the development of Western literary theory, there have been many arguments about the objectivity and subjectivity of text interpretation and the openness and certainty of significance, thus developing two directions: the interpretation that restores the author's intention and the text-centred interpretation. The author-centred classical hermeneutics is represented by Schleiermacher and Dilthey, the former adhering to objective idealism and stressing the commonality of understanding, while the latter stressing experience, understanding and expression from the perspective of spiritual science. Gadamer published *Wahrheit*

und Methode in the mid-twentieth century, a critique of the reductionist hermeneutics described above. The introduction of the terms “prejudice” and “horizon” caused a violent reaction. In the face of Gadamer’s radical attack on traditional hermeneutics, Hirsch published his book *Validity in Interpretation* in 1967 to promote the spirit of objectivity in traditional interpreting, which Hans-Georg Gadamer had rejected. Hirsch inherited part of Schleiermacher and Dilthey’s view of the objectivity of text. Schleiermacher and Dilthey’s partial objectivity of text, Hirsch pointed out clearly that the main reason for the confusion in interpretation is the confusion between the meaning and significance of text. Hirsch imaginatively reconstructs the speaking subject by distinguishing between meaning and significance and then explores the text’s trustworthiness, ultimately focussing on how to restore authorial intention by determining the probability of interpretation.

2. Method

2.1 *Defending the Certainty of Meaning*

Hirsch believes that the author’s original intention of text is objective, which is the basis for the reduction of the author’s intention and the only criterion for the validity of interpretation, and that the most probable interpretation can be found through the meaning of text, according to which Hirsch realises the theory of semantic autonomy, Hirsch thus achieves a counterattack on each of the three views of semantic autonomism, historicism and psychologism, and thus builds up the objectivity of text as a mediator: the speaking subject.

2.1.1 Distinguishing between Meaning and Significance

Hirsch thinks that the significance of a text should be the significance that the author intends to express, that is, meaning, but this view is attacked by the semantic autonomy theory represented by Eliot, Pound and so on. Semantic autonomy argues that once the author completes a text, it has its independence, and meaning has nothing to do with the author because the meaning intended by the author cannot be adequately expressed through public language. Therefore, the meaning intended by the author cannot be recovered. According to the viewpoint of semantic autonomy, different readers facing the same work are likely to get different understandings. Due to the lack of effective criteria, it is difficult to determine the probability of these understandings, which will inevitably lead to confusion in understanding, and the denial of the author by semantic autonomy is a cover-up of the author’s meaning. Hirsch calls what the author intends to express meaning and calls each understating produced when the reader reads the text significant, delimiting the boundary between understating and interpretation. Interpretation, the open-ended reading by the reader, can only have a different significance, which ultimately needs to be verified by meaning.

Secondly, Hirsch’s rebuttal of Gadamer focuses on dismantling his view of historicism, Gadamer’s critique of traditional interpreting science and aesthetic consciousness in *Wahrheit und Methode*, and the presentation of a historical vision. Defining interpretation as the reader’s re-creation activity, where

the author's original intention is distinguished from the reader's reading activity, and arguing that the interpretation that the reader acquires varies according to the different significance he or she discovers, Gadamer's view creates, like semantic autodidacticism, an Gadamer's view results in the same inability to test the validity of interpretation as semantic autonomy.

Finally, psychological scepticism argues that word meanings are not perfectly reproducible because the interpreter cannot bring himself fully into the author's state, and the meaning obtained by the interpreter must be different from the meaning intended by the author; Hirsch refutes this in a 'different way' style. 'Hirsch countered this by introducing Husserl's notion of intentionality, which presents the mental condition of a given situation and represents the ability of thoughts, beliefs etc. to point themselves towards something else (Crane, p. 454). Hirsch distinguishes between intentional activity and intentional content of consciousness, arguing that although intentional acts may differ, the intended purpose and object may be the same. Hirsch cites the example of the suitcase, where the same suitcase viewed from different perspectives ultimately points to the same suitcase, leading to what Hirsch calls the notion of type, whereby even though the reader interprets the same text from different perspectives, the resulting interpretation is in an intended type. Hirsch's *Faulty Perspectives* have since illustrated this view, an interpretation of abstract thought activity into figurative objects, which, although inevitably somewhat simplistic, intuitively divides intentional activity from content.

2.1.2 The Three Premises of the Defence of Authorship

By distinguishing meaning and significance, Hirsch points out that a return to authorial intent necessitates an imaginative reconstruction of the speaking subject. From the refutation of the three views above, the defence of authorship (a return to authorial intent through text) thus has three major premises: the commonality of human thought and the homogeneity of the external world, and the text centres on a combination of speculation through both the author's linguistic habits as an individual and the prevalence of linguistic conventions.

The commonality of human thought, derived from Husserl's concept of intentionality, simply means that the similarity of the way of thinking and the state of mental activity between human beings is the prerequisite for human beings to understand each other. As the carrier of the author's conscious activity, text language exists mainly as an intermediary, which is the basis for the reader to obtain significance through interpretation. Text language, as the carrier of the author's conscious activity, exists mainly as an intermediary, which is the basis for readers to obtain significance through interpretation. As for the external world, recognising the independence and self-existence of the world in its significance is the logical presupposition necessary to explain the objectivity of spiritual activity and its results, and the external world points to the material basis for the existence of the objectivity of interpretation. The spirit and the external world cannot simply be regarded as the subject and the object. The external world cannot simply be regarded as a subject-object dichotomy. However, it jointly points to the final criterion for the validity of interpretation, meaning an objective existence. The author's intended type

exists in the text in the form of meaning, and the reader obtains significance when interpreting the text, and the purpose of this is not to explore the content of the creator's consciousness. The content of the creator's consciousness. Due to the complexity of the author's creation, once a work is completed, it has multiple meanings that the author is aware of and fails to be aware of at the same time. Therefore, if we only start from the conscious meaning that the author is aware of to check the probability of interpretation, the existence of unconscious meaning in the text will likely cause errors. The existence of unconscious meaning in a text is difficult to count, so the only way to grasp meaning is to start from an imaginative reconstruction of the speaking subject, which leads to the only path for Hirsch's validity test, i.e., text.

Many scholars, from the perspective of the concept of MEANING, believe that the purpose of defending authorial slogans is to restore authorial intent, defining Hirsch's hermeneutic method as a hermeneutic of authorial intentionalism. However, regarding the specific interpretative path proposed by *Validity in Interpretation*, the so-called restoration of the author's intention is completely based on text, and everything starts from text. Hirsch's hermeneutical theory suggests that the certainty of meaning derives from the certainty of the meaning of the word text: "The meaning of a word is a whole that is united with itself, and furthermore, by this I mean that the meaning of a word is a whole that always remains the same and therefore does not change" (Hirsch, p. 46). The meaning expressed by the speaking subject is carried in the text by the meaning of the word, and the stability of meaning is based on the stability of the meaning of the word. Hirsch regards the meaning of the word as the existence of a stable range of meaning and points out that the meaning of the word is characterised by two main features; firstly, it has a certain range of meaning, which Hirsch calls "type". Hirsch calls it "type": meaning is reflected in the text through word meaning, so the meaning is divided by various interpretations of text; secondly, the certainty of meaning expressed by word meaning itself, which is homogeneous, for example, the word meaning of "Qipa" in Chinese. Hirsch regards the meaning of words in the text as "not only the type of intention that an author expresses with his linguistic symbols, but also something that others can understand by means of such symbols' understanding" (Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 49). Meaning is embedded in the lexical meaning of the text, and from the property of the type of lexical meaning, meaning as the intended type of the speaking subject is also the corresponding divisible object, and meaning is impersonal so that the receiver is able to imaginatively reconstruct the text through the text in the interpreting activity. Speaking subject.

If meaning is determined solely in terms of text, Hirsch's quest for objectivity in understanding is likely to fall into the semantic autodidactic approach to text interpretation, where the existence of word meanings determines the composition of meaning, and the divisible properties of word meanings are primarily determined by the context of the text, i.e., the world of authorial intention as a whole. World of authorial intention. Kalaga argues that Hirsch's entire argument is devoted to the defence of authorial intention as the only real coordinate in the interpretive process (Kalaga, p. 63). Thus, Hirsch requires

context and convention to determine the type of intentionality expressed by the speaking subject, i.e., the true genre.

2.2 from Genre to Real Genre

Hirsch proposes the concept of genre based on the divisible attributes of lexical meaning, i.e., the interpreter presupposes the type of expression to which the word belongs, which is a kind of fuzzy broad scope, a kind of approximate conjecture of meaning, and genre exists as a kind of conjectural concept of type, which is divided into true and untrue. In Hirsch's theory, a text can be quickly grasped as a whole through genre; for example, the genre is a kind of broad genre, through the text belongs to different genres, such as poetry or novels, directly from the perspective of the function of the genre to the overall guess of meaning. However, there is also the possibility that the genre is wrong, and a wrong grasp of the genre can lead to a wrong interpretation of the text since the receiver's interpretation depends heavily on speculating about the type of meaning expressed by the text and misguided interpretations arising from wrong genres may either have more Interpretations or interpretations with less probability will only find themselves misunderstood when they are broken by an interpreter. Thus, the prerequisite for greater probability is to determine which of the many genres is the true one.

2.2.1 Boundaries of Validation: The Real Genre

A true genre is defined as a certain deterministic whole that can be correctly understood by the interpreter among the various genre conceptions, which still exists in the text in the state of a type, and a true genre can be understood as a kind of correct range boundary in which the probability of the At the same time, there is a bi-directional validation between the interpretation and the genre, and if the interpretation within the genre is validated to have higher probability, the interpretation of the genre to which it belongs as a whole will have higher probability, and the interpretation of the genre will be validated to have higher probability. Hirsch introduces the notion of history between the true genre and the broader conception of genre to illustrate this. Hirsch argues that the relationship between the true genre and the broader conception of the genre is actually one of incorporation and incorporation, with the new type being incorporated into the old, and based on this, there is a continuous increase in the number of true genres. At the same time, regardless of whether it is correct or incorrect, a certain interpretation of the text in the genre also has an effect on subsequent interpretations, and the two are shown to influence each other in both directions on the historical timeline. Although Hirsch borrows the concept of history to illustrate the dynamics of Although Hirsch borrows the concept of history to illustrate the dynamic change of genre, there is a clear divergence between it and Hans-Georg Gadamer's view of historicism, which proposes the concept of horizontal fusion that is grounded on the foundation of the present horizon to continuously reach a new understanding that can be differentiated, unlike horizon fusion, there exists a criterion for true genre, which is the author's original intention. Interpretation of a certain text may have multiple genres, and the purpose of constantly determining the

correct genre is to speculate on the basis of the true genre so as to determine the interpretation with higher probability, close to the meaning of the speaking subject, such as denying the Chinese poet's meaning. For example, the reason for rejecting the positive attitude of Chinese poet Hai Zi's poem *Facing the Sea, Spring Flowers are Blooming* as the main implication of the poem is not that Hai Zi himself did not think of expressing it in this way, but rather that he himself did not intend to express such an implication. The author's initial intention remains the absolute law that the interpreter must unconditionally obey; that is, the real genre of textual interpretation depends on the type of intention of the speaking subject, not on whether the meaning is realised by the speaking subject (Hirsch, *Critical Inquiry*, p. 629). The interpreter's conjecture of getting some type of significance in the text is mediated by the speaking subject, and Hirsch thus returns to defending the author's position.

2.2.2 Historicity of Interpretation

On the basis of the distinction between meaning and significance, Hirsch proposes the concepts of understanding and interpretation (in addition to criticism, a concept devoted to describing the relationship of text to connected realities and values), which aim to distinguish the more probabilistic interpretations from the more numerous ones. Juhl similarly argues that a work may have one and only one correct interpretation while its meanings are infinite (Juhl, p. 226). Hirsch distinguishes between the meaning of Interpretation (the understanding of the meaning) and the revelation of the meaning (the elaboration of the meaning) that results from Interpretation; from a temporal point of view, the understanding is prior to the Interpretation exists, and from Interpretation, one can discern understanding, because Interpretation depends on understanding for its existence, and the two have a sequential historical relationship. Hirsch notes in *Validity in Interpretation* that "meaning itself is dependent on the view of the time, and, if the interpreter is to understand the meaning of the words of a certain age in his own time, he must follow a sort of double perspective in which he maintains his own position at the At the same time he must conceive the position of the declarant, and this is a characteristic of all mundane definitions conveyed" (Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 135). Understanding the text yields meaning, and interpreting the text yields significance. The purpose of verifying the validity of the interpretation is to constantly bring the significance obtained closer to the meaning, i.e., the type of interpreter uses text as a mediator in the reception of text in order to return to the understanding of the speaking subject's intentions. Beyond this ideal understanding, Hirsch's critique of extreme historicism is bound to recognise the historicity of understanding. Hirsch's establishment of meaning and significance establishes the certainty of understanding while also affirming the existence of certain historicity of interpretation. Because it is impossible to achieve an understanding that is fully compatible with meaning, interpretation can only conform to meaning as much as possible, which means that part of the existence of interpretation may be part of the composition of meaning. Hirsch uses translation as an example to illustrate the historical nature of the interpretation of meaning. Hirsch uses translation as an example to illustrate the elaboration and

implication of interpretation on meaning; translation is the use of a new language to elaborate the meaning of the original text, which presupposes that the translator has already understood the original text; Hirsch distinguishes between meaning and significance with understanding and interpretation, arguing that understanding can only conform to meaning as far as possible. Significance argues that understanding fundamentally belongs to the understanding of meaning, believing that there is a definite meaning, i.e., the meaning that the speaking subject intends to express. In contrast, interpretation, as a kind of receiver's text acceptance activity, may change according to the times and thus partially deviate from the meaning.

In contrast to the uniqueness of the criterion of understanding, interpretation has a unique historical nature, and the main purpose is to get a true understanding of the meaning through the validation of many kinds of interpretations. Thus, Hirsch's classification of what Gadamer calls understanding of text as interpretation is due to the fact that extreme historicism fails to recognise the invariance of the author's intended meaning. By clarifying the connection between understanding and interpretation, Hirsch clarifies the existence of the objectivity of authorial meaning in interpretation and thus further clarifies that the restoration of authorial intention lies in the validity test of interpretation, which examines the extent to which to what extent does interpretation reveal the meaning of the text.

2.3 Probability Judgement of Interpretation

In understanding and Interpretation, readers have different degrees of freedom, so there are many interpretations of meaning. In order to avoid the confusion caused by various interpretations of different genres, it is necessary to distinguish the validity of interpretations from each other. In order to avoid the confusion caused by various interpretations of different genres, it is necessary to distinguish the validity of different interpretations from each other, and the criterion of validity is to examine various new interpretations with the help of the interpretations which have already been examined as having a certain degree of probability through the evidential materials provided in a certain text. In the process of validation, previous interpretations may also be found to be erroneous, and as an erroneous interpretation in its own genre, it may cause a circularity of Interpretation, i.e., the receiver reads the text and believes that a certain genre is the meaning intended by the speaking subject, and the interpreter's subsequent interpretations will usually be in the same category as the original one. The interpreter's subsequent interpretations are usually confined to this genre, and the interpretations based on this genre will further support this genre so that the interpretations are, in a way, constantly defending the genres to which they belong. Taking the Chinese idiom of suspecting a neighbour to steal an axe as an example, a genre can be understood as a preconceived guess, but it is different from what Gadamer calls prejudice, which belongs to a kind of prejudgement, whereas a genre is mainly a kind of type, from which a variety of interpretations can be derived, where the only criterion for verification is still from the text. The only criterion for validation remains the author's original intention from the text. Since it is impossible for an interpretation to be completely exact with the author's original intention,

Hirsch introduces the concept of probability to indicate how far an interpretation is likely to conform to the speculation of the author's original intention or whether it belongs to, or is closer to, the true genre than the other interpretations. Probability can be understood as the plausibility that a given interpretation is likely to be correct; a validity test is one that states that an inference has the correct probability, and a Validity in Interpretation decision is not only one that states that the Interpretation is plausible. Interpretation is plausible, but this Interpretation interpretation is also more plausible than other interpretations. Interpretations derived from different genres are bound to have higher or lower probability among themselves, and accordingly, there is a criterion for determining the probability level. Interpretations with higher probability have higher validity, which is constantly checked by the material to see if they align with the author's original intention. Interpretation of the validity of the judgement is constantly being made to determine whether it is more in line with the author's original intention.

Hirsch accordingly proposes in *Validity in Interpretation* three criteria for determining plausibility: the degree of qualification of the family, the total number of members to which the family belongs, and the frequency with which individual features are presented in those members. Different genres give rise to many different interpretations, so the only way to improve validity and make it more consistent with the author's original intent is to focus on these three criteria based on the interpretation and to narrow the gap between the interpretation and the speculated true genre by further qualifying the interpretation. The incorporation of new types into old ones and the verification of unrevealed meanings using already revealed meanings. Hirsch argues that the key to evaluating different interpretations is to compare the relevant evidential material and that, in general, the more material required for a given revelation, the less probability it has because if its probability increases, it is necessary to compare clades and families, and if a given revelation cannot have the same probability, it is necessary for it to have the same probability. By this logical criterion, an interpretation with greater probability will generally be regarded as more consistent with the author's original intent, given the same level of restriction on the family. Interpretation can also be more rigorous by narrowing the object's scope. Based on the same family of objects, a rigorously encompassing family will always have greater probability or validity than a broad interpretation.

Hirsch has suggested that the purpose of hermeneutics lies in the defence of authorship by increasing our probability of being correct based on speculation about the author's original intent. Some people accordingly accuse Hirsch's theory of defence of the author as nothing more than an almost eloquent cycle of interpretation, imaginatively building up the speaking subject based on the text and then obtaining various interpretations from the text, which are interpreted and corroborated by each other through local discourse and the meaning of the whole. There is a deep schism between Hirsch's position that interpreting has objectivity and his anti-ontological position on the meaning of the written text. William Irwin: "The author's construction mainly involves the theorist's concept of the author, especially when this concept is applied to interpretation" (Irwin, p. 17). Hirsch takes the defence of

authorship as the only criterion for the validity of interpretation and proposes the concept of speaking subject, which, in fact, distinguishes the actual author, a natural person, from the speaking subject in the text, which is constructed imaginatively by the receiver during the receptive activity. In emphasising the authorial intention in the text, the author has been divested. However, Hirsch does not completely complete the conscious construction of the speaking subject and still takes the historical author as the object of reference in the validity test of interpretation, thus creating a conflict between understanding the intended significance of the text and interpreting it in the context of the author's specific era. Against certainty based on authorial intent, the method of returning to the certainty of authorial intent can only rely on subjective speculation. The accuracy of authorial intent cannot be verified; the only proof lies in the text. Thus, Hirsch defines his hermeneutic approach as focusing on that part of the significance that the author intends to express in the text, not so much by understanding meaning through the imaginatively constructed speaking subject, but by interpreting the text in order to speculate on the speaking subject. In other words, it is not the abstract speaking subject that defines the meaning, but the receiver's attempt to define the speaking subject through interpretation in the reading of the text, which is continuously filtered by validity tests to increase the probability of the meaning. The method of probability is the process of continuous interrogation of the speaking subject. At the same time, Hirsch, in refuting the scepticism of psychologism, takes Husserl's view of the intentional object and uses the analogy of a box to ignore the difference between different intentional objects and the existence of openness in the literary text itself is capable of generating different interpretations for different receivers, which is the root of the existence of different types of interpretations. This is also the root of different types of interpretations, but the literary text itself does not naturally have a definite homogeneity. According to the criterion of *Validity in Interpretation*, Hirsch limits the object of understanding to the spiritual horizon of the speaking subject, ignoring the multidimensionality and openness of the text's meaning. This inevitably leads to a split between theory and practice. Hirsch admits that there is no specific practical guideline for interpretation that can be applied to all texts and that this hermeneutic theory is not so much a practical method of operation as a possible conception.

3. Result

Tatar argues that Hirsch presupposes that the past can be apprehended independently (Tatar, pp. 2-3). Hirsch tries to stand on the objective interpretation position and provide the only criterion of meaning verification by the author's original intention. However, his hermeneutic theory is still concerned with the subject of the text rather than the author's intention because the meaning that verifies the validity of interpretation is obtained through the text. The reader's interpretation is only by the author's genre, which is imagined to exist, and since both conscious and unconscious meanings exist in the text at the same time, the reader is, in fact, unable to distinguish between what the author is aware of and what he or she is not aware of, and even if the author directly indicates the meaning that he or she intends to

express at the time of creation, his or her type of intention is not likely to be completely by the meaning of the text. As Hirsch puts it, the interpreter can only be more aware of the meaning object than the author, and the interpreter's confirmation of probability relies entirely on an imaginative reconstruction of the speaking subject based on an understanding of the textual lexis that can be distinguished. It should be assumed that the basic problem of interpretation is not so much to speculate on the author's original intention as to believe that through the reconstruction and speculation of the speaking subject, there exists a definitive meaning that verifies the plausibility of the many interpretations. And, as Adorno says, when critics and interpreters equate intention with content, a terrible confusion arises (Adorno, p. 216).

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